



The Adrian Training School, with some help from DaimlerChrysler Financial Services, is launching a new transitional program. Thirty-five DaimlerChrysler employees, including Judy Randle, came to Adrian on Friday to help prepare a building for the program. — Telegram photo by Mike Calamungi

Easing the transition

— Adrian's school for troubled girls and women prepares a new program to help residents after their release.

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ADRIAN — The Adrian Training School is starting a new transitional program and got a helping hand Friday from DaimlerChrysler Financial Services, as 35 of the company's employees showed up to paint and decorate the program's new facility and brought along a check for \$10,000.

The new transitional program, scheduled to start in December, will aim to help girls and women from the training school get out into the community and learn life and job skills along the way. Participants in the program will live in a separate residence hall that features apartment-style, independent living, rather than the school's typical dormitories.

The training school, a state Bureau of Juvenile Justice facility for girls and women ages 12 to 21, offers treatment for about 60 women referred by circuit and family courts throughout Michigan.

After finishing at the training school, residents often go to transitional programs or independent-living centers in other parts of the state. Sandra Bow, the school's director, said the new ATS program will make the school a "wrap-around service," giving women stability as they leave the school and re-enter the community.

"They typically would be returned to their homes or some other facility that has a supervised, independent-living program," Bow said. "What I'm saying to the court is there's an option for these girls. What better place to keep the kids than where you know them? It gives them an optimum chance of success because we know them."

Jennifer Williams, the school's transition coordinator, said the program will stress independent life skills.

"It's apartment-style living; they'll be working and going to school off-grounds, they'll be cooking for themselves," she said. "It's not only educating them with life skills, but allowing them to practice them."

Williams said she will work with local businesses and organizations, such as the Salvation Army, CVS Pharmacy, Bixby Medical Center and the Daily Bread of Lenawee soup kitchen, to help provide jobs and service opportunities to women in the program.

“We’re providing them opportunities to get exposure, to have opportunities within this community, to gain some skills to take back to their own community or, better yet, to stay in Adrian,” Bow said. “If we don’t prepare them here, where will they get those opportunities?”

Along with working and volunteering, women in the transitional program will be expected to take classes at Jackson Community College, the Lenawee Intermediate School District’s Vo-Tech Center or even at ATS itself.

“If the need be that you stay here and get academic services here, then so be it, but we’d like to have them enroll in programs across the street,” Bow said.

Another facet of the new program is a partnership with DaimlerChrysler Financial Services, which Williams said will provide mentoring and educational opportunities as well as financial and volunteer support.

DCFS employees arrived at the ATS campus Friday morning and painted the rooms in the new transitional residence hall, christened as the Cynthia Gray Transition Hall in honor of one of the school’s long-time volunteers.

Paul Knauss, DCFS’ chief operating officer, presented Williams, Bow and other school officials with a check for \$10,000, which will be used to purchase furnishings, bedding and other amenities for the hall.

“The idea is to personalize the rooms,” Bow said. “We want to make the girls feel like they’re not in an institution.”

Williams said DCFS employees will return to the transitional program to hold workshops on topics like personal finance and financial literacy.

“We want to help women develop the skills necessary to enter into the corporate world,” said Monique Tate, co-chair of community relations for the DCFS Women’s Forum. “We want to show them there are strong, professional women they can use as role models.”

Williams said the program’s capacity will be 12 women — the residence hall has 12 bedrooms — but that it may start out with fewer students.

“We’d rather be successful with a smaller number at first,” she said.

Bow said the women in the program will be the “cream of the crop,” and that the expanded freedoms of the transitional program will be met with high expectations.

“This is about taking care of your business up here, and making attainable goals for the future,” Bow said. “Two strikes and you are out of the program. If you can’t do those things, you will go back directly to the ATS campus.”